



The Mountain Crier

The Official Newsletter of the American Community in Lesotho

U.S. Embassy ♦ Maseru

January 2005

From the Front Office

Happy New Year to Everyone! We hope you had a wonderful and restful holiday. We want to thank each and everyone for their excellent contributions during the end-of-year visit by the US Treasury Ambassador Zoellick and his delegation.

As we begin the year, we emphasize our continuing commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS with education, prevention and treatment. Our training here will continue to be an important part of our work. And, we will collaborate with you as well as the broader community in this critical battle for life. Your on-going support and contributions are appreciated.

Welcome to the new Editor/Community Liaison Officer, Edie Dunn. She is most welcome and will get to know you well. Welcome again!

Ambassador Perry
& Embassy Front Office

US EMBASSY

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22-312-666

Health Unit

Mon. 7:30-12:30, 14:00-17:00
Tues. 7:30-12:30
Wed. 7:30-12:30
Thurs. 7:30-12:30, 14:00-16:00
Fri. 7:30-12:30

U.S. Embassy Cashier

Mon. 9:00-12:00, 14:00-16:00
Tues. 9:00-12:00
Wed. 9:00-12:00, 14:00-16:00
Thurs. 9:00-12:00
Fri. 9:00-12:00

Community Liaison Office

Mon. 8:00-17:00
Tues. 8:00-17:00
Other hours available by appointment

American Citizen Consular Services

Mon. 7:30-13:00, 14:00-17:00
Tues. 7:30-13:00, 14:00-17:00
Wed. 7:30-13:00, 14:00-17:00
Thurs. 7:30-13:00, 14:00-17:00
Fri. 7:30-13:30

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers:

Welcome to the resurrected *Mountain Crier*. After a long hiatus, we are back! Maseru is a relatively small post, so at this time we are only intending to publish monthly.

Our staff currently consists of one regular news hound --- namely yours truly. We would welcome contributions from the larger expatriate community. If you have something to say, or are simply feeling creative, send your musings to the *Mountain Crier*. We would be pleased to consider either occasional offerings or a regular column. News, commentary, poetry or even amusing doodles are all encouraged.

This month's issue focuses on lightning safety. The recent incident in which Peace Corps volunteers were injured led me to think that this might be a timely topic. It isn't always possible to predict lightning as our feature article indicates. However, Lesotho is a high-risk locale for this natural phenomenon. Perhaps with a little extra safety awareness, we can avoid placing ourselves in danger. May you all have a happy, healthy and safe New Year!

Sincerely,
Edie Dunn

Lightning Strikes Peace Corps Volunteers

December 2, 2004 was a warm and sunny afternoon in the Maseru District. Twenty-one Peace Corps trainees were assembled in the Mahloenyeng Village (about a 40-minute drive from downtown Maseru) for their language training class. As they waited for lessons to begin, some trainees and staff were already inside the modest tin-roofed, one story house used for language training. Others lounged under an adjacent tree just outside. No one was aware that there were any adverse weather conditions. There were no indications of danger.

Then at approximately 2:30 PM it happened---literally a bolt out of the blue! Lightning struck the house injuring two trainees, a Peace Corps trainer, and one staff member. Those under the nearby tree also felt the charge as it coursed through the ground, but managed to escape serious injury. Unfortunately, those already inside the house were not as lucky and sustained the most serious injuries.

Four Peace Corps Trainees and two instructors were hospitalized. Numerous others were treated and released. Three of the trainees were released from the MediClinic in Bloemfontein the day after the incident. A fourth trainee was released on Saturday, December fourth, but continued to receive

treatment from the Peace Corps Medical Officer. The two instructors were released from the Maseru Private Hospital that same day.

These individuals were fortunate to survive. Lightning strike survivors are at risk for long-term or permanent neurological damage. However, I recently spoke to Peace Corps Medical Officer Dr. Jim Creighton, who has conveyed a happy ending for this story. While the long-term effects of lightning are never certain, at this time none of the Mahloenyena victims appear to have sustained any permanent damage. We at the *Mountain Crier* wish them all a full recovery!

Myth, Folklore and Superstition

The ancient Greeks believed that lightning was a javelin thrown by the god Zeus. As with many cultures (including our own), natural phenomenon is often associated with myth, folklore and superstition. The traditional Sesotho culture is no exception.

The Basotho, like many other tribes across southern Africa, believed lightning to be a large bird. "It is variously described as a great brown bird, or a fish-eagle with a white neck, or with red legs and shiny feathers like a peacock. The bird is said to lay a big egg where it strikes, and some think these bring good fortune while others say they are unlucky and must be destroyed by a doctor. If

the lightning bird itself can be caught it is of great value for medicine. People who are struck by lightning are said to have been scratched by the claws of the bird." (from *African Mythology* by G. Parrinder, 1967, p. 75).

It is interesting to note that the lightning bird of Sesotho myth bears a striking resemblance to the Thunderbird of Native American myth. Both southern African and Native American myth agree that the bird can tear bark off trees with its claws. Native American tribes from the Northeastern, Midwestern Plains, and Pacific Northwest areas of America tell stories of the Thunderbird. The Quillayat describe the Thunderbird as having feathers as long as a canoe paddle. The Winnebago describe the Thunderbird as either an eagle or a hawk with polychrome plumage. When the Thunderbird flaps his wings he makes a loud sound and creates great gusts of wind. Lightning is formed when he opens and shuts his eyes. A feather or bone from the Thunderbird contains great power, bringing luck and curing illness.

Some anthropologists believe that lightning is widely associated with large birds because they glide along thermal air movements. It is easy to imagine that ancient people observed eagles and hawks exploiting the aerodynamics of the warm air preceding a storm.

The Basotho have always recognized lightning as a powerful and dangerous force that could not be controlled — except perhaps by magic! Certain natural locations in Lesotho are believed to have a magical attraction for lightning. In fact, it is certainly possible that these locations are more susceptible to strikes for reasons that can only recently be explained scientifically. It is possible, for example, that geological formations containing high iron content are more susceptible to lightning strikes than adjacent ground containing less or no iron content.

Lightning is traditionally perceived in Sesotho culture as being either good or evil. There are individuals who are assumed to have the ability to control lightning — namely the “witch doctors.” Witch doctors are thought to control lightning through magic. Interestingly, the Peace Corps was told by the Mahloenyeng villagers that there was a curse put on the training house by a local witch doctor. A rival of the rented house’s local owner apparently hired the witch doctor. Hence, this lightning strike was perceived by many of the villagers as the result of magic.

It is not uncommon for people in Lesotho to be killed by lightning. Traditionally, victims of lightning were not buried in the normal manner, and a separate set of

burial rites was used. A person killed by lightning was buried outside their village in opposition to normal practices.

And now, we will attempt to elucidate some of the facts. While certainly awe inspiring, science has managed to unravel some of the mysteries of lightning. An understanding lightning’s nature will help avoid danger.

Lightning: How is it Formed?

Thunderstorms are a regular occurrence in Lesotho. Although they do not always produce rain, they are frequently accompanied by lightning. According to the Lesotho Meteorological Services, lightning strikes are more frequent during the summer season (November-February). While the lightning is very beautiful, it can also be deadly. Each branch of lightning can reach over five miles in length, attain temperatures of 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and contain 100 million volts of electricity.

While lightning can be produced by a number of different atmospheric conditions, it is most often produced by thunderstorms. Thunderstorms require three main components: moisture, instability and something that causes the air to rise (such as a cold front). As air is forced higher, the temperature drops causing ice particles to form in the cloud. The ice particles play a key role in the

formation of conditions that produce lightning. The ice particles collide with one another, producing a static charge.

Each ice particle gains either a positive or a negative charge. Positively charged particles migrate to the top of the clouds, while negatively charged particles fall to the bottom. The final result is a cloud with two differentially charged zones. The thunderstorm cloud continues to gather positively charged particles along the ground as it travels. Positively charged particles are drawn up taller objects such as trees, telephone poles and buildings.

Lightning is either positively or negatively charged. The negatively charged area originating at the bottom of the storm cloud will send out an invisible charge toward the ground. When it gets close to the ground, it is attracted by the positively charged objects, and lightning is formed.

Positively charged lightning originates at the top of the cloud. It frequently strikes away from the center of the storm, either ahead or behind the cloud, and can strike as far as ten miles from the storm locale. This type of lightning also tends to have a longer duration and carries a high peak electrical current.

Thunder always accompanies lightning. The rapid expansion of

heated air surrounding the lightning channel causes thunder. Since light travels faster than sound, the thunder will be heard after the lightning is seen. Thus, the distance of the lightning can be calculated by measuring the time lapse between the lightning flash and the thunder.

According to the U.S. National Weather Service, there is a "30-30 Rule" to determine the threat level of lightning. When you see lightning, count the number of seconds before you hear thunder. "If there are 30 seconds or less between the flash and the thunder, the storm is within six miles (10km) of your location and is dangerous. Seek shelter immediately...Wait at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder before leaving the shelter. Don't be fooled by sunshine or blue sky!"

Lightning Safety

You can minimize your risk of being hit. The most important aspect of lightning safety is to be aware of the weather. If you can hear thunder, you are in danger, even if the skies are blue. You and your family should have a lightning safety plan for both indoors and outdoors.

Here are some prudent precautions that can help you in developing a personal and family safety plan:

Outdoors:

- Avoid water. Water is a good conductor of electricity. If you are in a pool, get out and seek shelter!
- Avoid high ground. Lightning will tend to hit the nearest (i.e. tallest) object. Keep in mind that if you take refuge under the tallest object in the area, you are putting yourself at risk. Therefore, do not stand under or near trees.
- Avoid open spaces. The reason is the same as for item #2. If you are the tallest object in an open field, the lightning may hit you.
- Avoid unsafe and ungrounded "shelters." Open canopies and picnic shelters do not usually have any type of lightning protection. A shelter that does not contain plumbing or wiring throughout, or some other mechanism for grounding from the roof to the ground is not safe.
- Avoid groups of people, as they can become attractive lightning targets. Electricity is easily conducted from one person to another. Keep in mind that many victims are struck as the current runs along the ground. Stand at least 15 feet away from other people.
- Avoid contact with metal objects.
- Find a low ditch and climb in. Crouch down as low as possible until the storm safely passes.
- A car can offer shelter if there is no other safe area available. The rubber tires offer some limited protection since an electrical current cannot be conducted from the ground. Get inside the car and roll up all the windows. Avoid contact with any metal parts of the car.

Indoors:

There are three ways that lightning enters buildings: (1) a direct strike, (2) through wires or pipes that extend outside the structure, and (3) through the ground.

- Stay away from doors and windows.
- Avoid contact with anything that conducts electricity. This includes plumbing, electrical appliances, telephones and metal bars. Also avoid contact with concrete since it may have metal reinforcement bars. Avoid washers and dryers since they contain an electrical path to the outside through the dryer vent.
- Most surge protectors will NOT protect your home during a lightning storm. Unplug appliances and electrical equipment where possible. Don't forget to unplug computer modems!

At least one American I know recently had his modem fried during a lightning storm.

What to Do in an Emergency!

Call Nurse, Sofia Mutize (5886 7428), and Duty Officer (5888 4035) immediately if a lightning strike affects any Embassy or Peace Corps personnel. If a strike affects a family member, phone for emergency assistance, or take the victim to the hospital as quickly as possible.

If you are near someone or something that has been hit by lightning, do not approach until you check that the scene is safe. If there are any wires or items nearby that could still be conducting electrical current, *do not approach*. A person who has been hit, either directly or indirectly, by lightning, or who has experienced electrical shock needs medical attention.

If it is safe to approach the victim, first check the "A-B-C's" Airway, Breathing, and Circulation. If the victim is not breathing, or has no pulse, the situation is *emergent*. If you are trained to perform rescue breathing or CPR, you may consider doing so as you wait for medical professionals to arrive.

A victim of a lightning strike may also have electrical burns on some parts of her/his body. Make sure you point out any observations

about the victim to medical professionals when they arrive.

Further Information

More information on lightning and lightning safety is available on-line from the U.S. National Weather Service

[www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov], or from the National Lightning Safety Institute [www.lightningsafety.com].

[MC thanks the following contributors to this article: A. Blosser, M. J. Thomas, J. Crieghton, and S. Gill. Also thanks to B. Sekoli of the Lesotho Meteorological Services.]



HIV/AIDS Training Held at the American Embassy, Maseru

The US Embassy in Maseru and Peace Corps Maseru held a HIV/AIDS Training seminar on January 05 and 06, 2005. Attendance was mandatory for US government employees. Spouses and children of employees, and teachers from the American International School also attended. The seminar was conducted by Dr. Mphu Ramatlapeng of Mafeteng hospital. In addition to her practice in private surgery, Dr. Ramatlapeng runs an HIV/AIDS treatment program sponsored by the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

Testimonies were heard from those living with, and caring for individuals with HIV.

The seminar focused on Voluntary Counseling and Voluntary Testing (VCT). Employees were urged to know their status, and to be ambassadors in the prevention of this pandemic disease. Those who brought their spouses had the opportunity to be counseled and tested as a couple. It was encouraging to see young people opting for the one-on-one voluntary counseling and testing.

The official opening was introduced by the wife of the Prime Minister, Mrs. 'M'athato Mosisili, and Madam Ambassador, Mrs. June Perry. In her speech the First lady commended the post's policy of providing Voluntary Counseling and Testing to the employees. She urged each person to be an "ambassador" in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Mrs. Mosisili highlighted the figures surrounding the disease in Lesotho, which has reached a 40 to 60 percent infection rate in the general work force. The life expectancy in Lesotho has dropped to below forty years. The disease will result in escalating costs for Lesotho businesses in maintaining and recruiting staff, and reduce the availability of experienced professionals.

The Ambassador, Mrs. June Perry, encouraged the employees to

attend Voluntary Counseling and Testing, and provided assurance that no one will be discriminated against because of his/her positive HIV status. Employees were not forced to disclose their HIV status and if one did so it would be voluntary.

-S. Mutize



The American School Update

The AISL School Board will Meet Monday January 14 at 5:30 pm in House three on the school grounds. All parents of current or prospective students are invited to attend.

The AISL Parent Teacher Organization will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 17 at 6:00 PM in building three. The major item will be planning for the Annual International Dinner to be held on February 26, 2005.

The American International School of Lesotho has openings for students at all levels in grades pre-K through grade seven. The school is just starting the second of three terms. Please call 22 322 987 if you require more information.

The school is in need of volunteers to help with the swimming program, work as teacher aides and help with other activities

such as soccer. Please call the school at 22 322 987 for more information.

The school is seeking American and non-American experienced and certified teachers for the 2005-2006 school year. If interested, please submit your qualifications to the Director, AISI, Box 333, Maseru 100, Lesotho.



Around Town

Shopping in Maseru can be a challenge. Between the constant harassment by panhandlers and the lack of centralized outlets for consumer goods, a lot of foreigners simply give up and assume that there is an absence of certain products. This, however, may not always be the case. Americans are accustomed to everything being available at the local Supermarket. The *rest* of the world, as many experienced expats will note, does not always follow the American marketing model. Here are a few alternative outlets to consider when searching for your favorite products in Maseru.

Bread. Ah, the staff of life...there is nothing like freshly baked bread! As many of you know, Lancer's bakes theirs daily. However, upon a visit to this fine establishment you will often only find the loaf variety. I discovered quite by accident one day that Lancer's Bakery also makes French-style baguettes...crispy on the outside, light and fluffy on the inside. They do not have them every day, so try calling ahead. Then, pull out the Brie and a bottle of wine, and enjoy!

Oriental Foods. Hankering for rice crackers or some seaweed wraps? How about spicy ramen noodles or Chinese dumplings? Yes, you could visit the local Chinese restaurant...*or* you could get out your wok and rice steamer and make them yourself! There are a number of excellent Oriental Grocers in Maseru and also in nearby Ladybrand. The Peace Restaurant in Maseru is fronted by a grocery store selling many oriental delicacies destined for home kitchens. My favorites include the short-grained rice, fresh tofu, and frozen dumplings and buns. The dumplings are especially nice on those evenings when you want to pull something quick out of the freezer for dinner. If you don't have a steamer, the dumplings can be either pan-fried (fry until bottoms are light brown, add a small amount of water and cover until cooked through) or steamed in the microwave (just

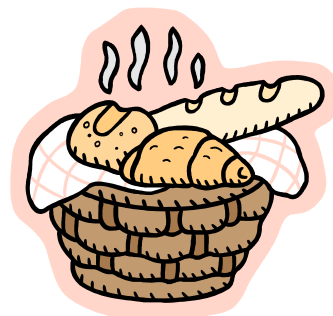
place on a microwave safe plate and cover with plastic wrap.) Add a green salad, and enjoy!

Pasta and Produce. Those of us who are hard-core Italian cuisine mavens will not have much regard for the cheaper varieties of macaroni sold in many of the local shops. One is more likely to end up with what an Italian friend of mine referred to as "*pasta morte*" (i.e. pasta that is mushy). Mushy pasta is often more than simply a matter of over-cooking. It can be the result of pasta that is made with inferior quality flour. It has been my experience that most pasta manufactured in Italy is made with good quality durum semolina flour, and can be cooked "*al-dente*." The "Fruit and Veg City" in Maseru, sells imported Italian olive oil and dried pasta. I have found the quality of these to be quite reasonable. Fruit and Veg City also carries a wide array of local fresh produce, bulk nuts and dried fruits at low prices...*buon appetito!*

Spices. When I first arrived in Maseru, I was told that spices were not locally available. A visit to the nearby supermarkets explained why one might at first assume such a thing. The choice of spices included peri-peri (a type of chili-powder), a cheap variety of commercially prepared curry powder, lemon pepper and salt---not a great selection. It seemed difficult to believe, however, that

there was nothing more available, especially considering the large Indian population that has made their home in Maseru. Then one day, I happened upon the "Fahidda Cash and Carry Market." The moment I walked into the door, the pungent aroma of Indian spices hit me. Here one can find a large variety of both whole and ground spices. There is one catch---you need to either be able to recognize the spices by smell or know their Hindi name! Not to worry...here is a brief guide.

Allspice	<i>kabab cheene</i>
Cardamom	<i>elachi</i>
Chilies	<i>mirchi</i>
Cinnamon	<i>dhall cheene</i>
Clove	<i>laong</i>
Coriander	<i>dunia</i>
Cumin	<i>jeera</i>
Ginger	<i>sont</i>
Mace	<i>jaffatry</i>
Mint	<i>pootheena</i>
Nutmeg	<i>jaiphul</i>
Saffron	<i>zuffron</i>
Turmeric	<i>huldee</i>



Announcements & Classifieds

The US Embassy will be closed in observation of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 17, 2005) and President's Day (February 21, 2005).



Information on foreign-service life is available to government employees and their families at the CLO office. Publications on file address overseas moves, how the embassy functions, the challenges of life abroad and other topics relevant to Department of State families.

The CLO will be conducting a "Needs Assessment" survey. This survey will help us develop a CLO program to serve the needs of the local American community so that we may augment the quality of life in Lesotho. We would appreciate Department of State employees, Peace Corps employees and their spouses taking the time to answer the two-page questionnaire. We also welcome participation by other American citizens living in Lesotho. If you have not received a questionnaire and would like to participate, please contact Edie at

dunnea@state.gov, or contact the CLO during office hours.

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation and the Overseas Briefing Center are sponsoring the tenth annual worldwide contest for production of a video that depicts life for children and teens at foreign posts. The contest is open to family members (ages 10-18) of USG direct hire and contract employees assigned to the US Embassy. The video must be submitted in VHS format, and ideally should be 15 to 30 minutes in length. Minimal assistance from adults is requested in the video production. Submissions must be received by April 15, 2005. Send submissions to:

KIDVID Contest
Overseas Briefing Center
Room E2126
Shultz Center
Department of State
Washington, DC 20522
-4201

Local Artist Jacky Lee of Machabeng College sells note cards hand painted with Lesotho scenes. Individual portraits are also available. Contact information is on file at the CLO office.

If you have an announcement you would like to post in the Mountain Crier, please contact Edie at the CLO office.